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THE MOWER

Anonymous Gift

CONSTANTIN MEUNIER

"THE MOWER."

By CONSTANTIN MEUNIER.

THE development of certain manifestations of art in the direction of an intimate study of peasant life, since the days of the Barbizon school, has been a subject of interest to many philosophers and art critics of a socialistic tendency. That a deep and appreciative sympathy was felt by the artists is indeed true, but much has been written about art and its specific expressions which is open to criticism on the ground that feelings and intentions have been credited to the artist which may or may not have been there. The message of Constantin Meunier, however, is not one that admits of misunderstanding. His direct and truthful expression, whether in painting or sculpture, embodies the spirit of the Belgian workmen, either as a miner or a laborer in the field. An artist of lesser genius might easily become gross, or morbid, even with a touch of caricature; but Meunier is impressed with the higher, nobler spirit which the true workman possesses, who seeks to do his task to the best of his ability, proud of his strength, and patient with his lot.

An artist of such ability is preëminently deserving of representation in a Museum of Fine Arts. The addition to the collections of the School of Design of a bronze statuette by Meunier is therefore one of general interest. This is a gift to the Museum from an anonymous friend. The subject is called "The Mower," and presents a remarkable study of "arrested action," full of strength and truthfulness. The keen analysis of muscular action, the careful treatment of dress, the freedom of movement, and the feeling for design, all combine to give this work distinction. The idea of the bronze is based upon a sketch from nature painted in oils in 1858. The first bronze statuette was made in 1890, while our figure dates from 1892.

Not all sculptors are trained to think in the material in which the work of art is executed. Bronze was peculiarly fitted to

Meunier's purpose, owing to its effect on shadows, and the sharpness of edge which is possible. The ability to think in the material for final execution was characteristic of the best of the artists of past days whether Greek, Roman or Renaissance. In this respect Rodin and Meunier are almost in a class by themselves in modern art.

The emphasis in art of the past century has been in the direction of realism up to recent days. The result has been the flooding of the world with paintings and sculpture which only rise above the mediocre when the artist uses realism as a means to an end. It was Burne-Jones who once said, "Remember the noblest things in the hands of the vulgar man are vulgar, and the meanest things in the hands of the great man are noble."

In this respect Meunier rises far above simple realism to the level of the truly great leaders in the modern movement. In him one feels the truth of W. E. Henley's statement that "It is the artist's function not to copy, but to synthesize; to eliminate from that gross confusion of actuality which is his raw material, whatever is accidental, idle, irrelevant, and select for perpetuation that only which is appropriate and immortal." Such power is only achieved after years of labor and observation; this when obtained develops a surety of treatment wherein the technical excellence is accepted as a matter of course, and the expression of mature feeling is evidenced. Christian Brinton has called attention to Meunier's "earnest striving to get closer and closer to the outward verity and the inner vision." In this search he was actuated by a sympathy, a power of subjecting detail to general spirit, and a technical skill which creates the happy combination of living presence, dignity of labor, and quality. Meunier, in all of these manifestations of his genius, has easily given evidence of his superiority in his chosen field. The "Mower," as one of the fine examples of his artistic strength, readily commends itself to the earnest student and the lover of art. L. E. R.

THE MUSEUM SMALL BUT FIT.

THE history of the development of the museum of art in America covers a period of about forty-two years. This brief period has been characterized by two interesting developments, the growth of several great metropolitan museums in the largest cities, as in New York, Boston and Chicago, and a surprising number of galleries and museums which are springing up all over the country. From the viewpoint of the museum of the metropolis, these last come under the general head of "small museums." This often means, as the largest institutions see it, a relatively smaller number of valuable works of art. The galleries which have not the advantage of metropolitan situation and very large gifts are, however, in a position to be of very great service both to the community of which they are the center of artistic interests, and to the country at large.

The independence of origin, growth and support is preëminently American. In the first place, the growth is a spontaneous one, for in no case has an American art museum received the financial assistance from the city or state which is a distinguishing characteristic of most of the European museums. Many of them owe their inception to the public-spirited generosity of one or two lovers of art. Where such a museum has been founded to be known forever as a memorial, it has been handicapped from the start, in a way which the founder did not realize. This is especially true when the question of later gifts is concerned, for there are few collectors who care about adding undue prominence to the name of another connoisseur. In a few cases the smaller museum has received as its first gift an entire collection of works of art which come from a single source, often representing an individual's development of taste, but which, when judged from the impartial museum standard, contains a great deal of material that might to advantage, be relegated to a study-series. Fortunate indeed is the museum

which is not obliged to struggle against the above mentioned difficulties.

One distinct advantage of the small art museum in America is that it is not called upon to serve as custodian for works of art which are judged not worthy of exhibition by the larger museums, but which are owned by them. Such a situation is inevitable in Europe where the institution receives government support.

The American public is not as yet one which as a whole thoroughly appreciates the interest or value of any art collection of importance. It is slowly growing to appreciate the need of the community for the education and happiness which collections of beautiful objects can give. One of the reasons may be that not so many years ago philanthropic interests were centered on the colleges and academies, and especially did much to support institutions which cared for the poor and the sick. It is only in recent years that the public-spirited citizen has realized that it is well to provide for those who may not have the advantage of higher education, and especially for the awakening of everyone to the vital part that art in its many manifestations plays in life. One of the greatest aids in this direction is the American museum of art, which has clearly shown that the enjoyment of works of art is not necessarily reserved for the person of means, but is open to everyone. Surely any institution which interests 75,000 or more visitors a year may be called an important factor in the development of the nation.

The criticism has often been offered against museums of art that they do not arouse any great enthusiasm in the visitor. This may be true of an institution which considers that its duty is done when its galleries contain collections which are never varied, but it can hardly hold true in the case of an art museum which interests the public by its docent service, publications and public lectures, and by a comprehensive plan of varying its exhibitions in order that each visit to the galleries may become an opportunity to see some-

thing new and worth while. All of this must be actuated by a sense of fitness of things, a strict adherence to high standards of quality, an earnest desire to meet the immediate and future needs of the community at large and of the individual in particular, and by a constant study of the conditions of the public mind which would permit of still further development and extension of service. In short, the strength of the American institutions always lies in their readiness to perform service. There are none of these branches of activity that a relatively small museum may not perform, with distinct advantage to all concerned.

The institution which has kept in mind the gradual acquisition of a permanent collection, both in painting and the other manifestations of art, which judges all purchases and gifts from the high museum standard, and which exercises all of the above mentioned branches of activity, may indeed be called "fit." When in addition it is intimately allied with a school of art, its possibilities are even greater. For over thirty years the Rhode Island School of Design has been developing the special activities noted above, and has been seeking to render as complete service as possible to the city and state. Of this its many friends are aware, while the visitors who spend many pleasant hours in its galleries enjoy the opportunities which a live institution may render. Happy in freedom of foundation, in no way handicapped by collections received in entirety under conditions, already the fortunate possessor of a notable collection, the Rhode Island School of Design looks forward to a growth that will not be denied.

A CORINTHIAN VASE.

AMONG the recent additions to the Classical collection is a Corinthian vase of very considerable interest. It is an oinochoë or wine jug of characteristic shape, material and decoration, and dates from the seventh century B. C. The especial features of this class of Greek ceramics are the strongly Oriental influences which find expression in the



ITALO-CORINTHIAN OINOCHOË
Greek 7th Cen. B. C.
Gift of Mrs. GUSTAV RADEKE

decoration. On the greenish yellow clay ground there are to be noted two broad bands of griffons, deer, sphinxes and birds. Our vase shows adherence to type also in the black silhouette of the figures, in the use of red or violet paint for certain features and in the incised lines which border the figure or emphasize the details. These colors are rarely as well preserved as the black glaze, for frequently they were superimposed upon the black, and were not subjected to any extended firing. The problem of the empty space in the background was a difficult one for the artist of the early days. Again borrowing characteristic features from the East, he has filled up the areas with rosettes. It is rather uncommon to find Greek vases in an unbroken condition, especially of this size or larger. This, however, is the condition of this recent accession.

The prominent position which Corinth held in the commercial and artistic interests of the Mediterranean world in the seventh century B. C., and the wide dispersion of its wares through trade, creates an added interest in its ceramics, of which the vase illustrated above is so perfect an example. This vase is a gift from Mrs. Gustav Radeke.

THE BAKST EXHIBITION.

THE exhibition of the work of Léon Bakst which was hung in the galleries in January aroused so much enthusiasm and interest that arrangements were made, through the courtesy of the Berlin Photographic Company, for the continued exhibition of a large part of the collection for February. This widespread interest was awakened by the versatility, the superb sense of color, the historical sympathy, and the new note in stage-craft which was there expressed. The artist by his remarkable genius has placed himself among that small group of innovators who have brought fresh inspiration into a world quite wearied with mediocrity.

The life and work of Léon Bakst have been so frequently discussed in essays and catalogues that the principal features must be well known. In America we are especially indebted to Mr. Martin Birnbaum's able and critical essay in the introduction to the Bakst catalogue.

Léon Bakst was born in Petrograd in 1868. His first appearances in the artistic world were hardly indicative of the pronounced individuality which he has since developed. In 1895 he visited Paris, finding conditions there much more congenial than in Russia. Although he again tempted fate in Petrograd, he soon returned to Paris for permanent residence. His success in the theatre began in 1909, and his prolific imagination and sense of color-treatment have there found constant expression ever since. His attitude towards the problem of stage-setting was a unique one, for he held, as we are told by Mr. Birnbaum, that "a stage-setting is not primarily a landscape or a study of architecture, but as though it were a painting into which the human figures had not yet been painted."

His genius has not only added new beauties to the presentation of the opera, but has transformed the ballet. The combination of Russian music, exponents of the Russian ballet such as Mlle. Pavlova



Costume Sketch for "LE DIEU BLEU."

By L. BAKST

Recent Gift.

and M. Nijinsky, and the stage-setting by Bakst has taken Paris and London by storm, for the ensemble is beyond criticism as a work of art. Among the ballets to which he has turned his genius are "Cléopâtre," "Salomé," "Narcisse," "Daphnis and Chloë," "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune," "Hélène de Sparte," "Le Dieu Bleu," "Thamar," "Les Papillons" and "La Carnaval." Not less distinctive are his designs for "Boris Godounow," "Pisanelle" and "St. Sebastien." The illustration shows a costume drawing of "Le Fiancé" for "Le Dieu Bleu" in which a delicate rose-pink has been chosen as the predominant note in the coat. This design was the one chosen by Bakst for the cover of a European catalogue issued on the occasion of an exhibition of his work. This drawing, which is so characteristic of Bakst's surety of touch and subjection of individual figures to the general design, has been given to the Museum by a friend of the institution.

The exhibition brought to the attention

of many visitors schemes for stage-settings, costume sketches, several water-color studies of landscape, other decorative studies of distinction, and carefully drawn sketches of beauty and charm. The student found a definite expression with elimination of unnecessary detail and an Eastern emphasis of positive color, but with an equal ability for securing harmony by contrast. Perhaps above everything else of moment is the artist's genius to think as the occasion demanded in terms of the period, whether Greek, Egyptian, Byzantine, Persian, Indian, Renaissance or Modern.

The message of the Bakst Exhibition is that of the proper use and adaptation of historical material to modern uses, of a revolt against conventional mediocrity and a revelation of the possibilities in the improvement of the stage.

L. E. R.

NOTES.

AMERICAN PAINTING EXHIBITION.—Through the courtesy of the American Federation of Arts, there was exhibited in the galleries during February a collection of forty-three paintings by contemporary American artists. These pictures had been selected from the exhibitions in Philadelphia, New York, Pittsburg, Washington and Chicago.

The group as shown brought to the attention of our visitors the work of such artists as George Bellows, John Carlson, Ben Foster, Daniel Garber, Robert Henri, John C. Johansen, Jonas Lie, H. D. Murphy, Carl J. Nordell, Gardner Symons, Everett L. Warner and Irving R. Wiles. Among the paintings of especial interest were "Washington Square" by Jonas Lie and "Rain on the River" by George Bellows. The latter painting has been purchased by the Rhode Island School of Design, and will be discussed in a later issue of the Bulletin.

WOOD-BLOCK PRINTS BY MRS. EDNA BOIES HOPKINS.—The work of Mrs. Edna Boies Hopkins was illustrated in a group

of twenty-eight colored wood-block prints which was shown in March. The treatment of flowers in a decorative manner has attracted artists for centuries, but it has remained for the Japanese to show that happy union of sympathetic study of nature and an instinctive sense of design which is so evident in their best work. Mrs. Hopkins has given expression to a kindred feeling, perhaps learning much from the Oriental artist. Happy in color treatment, and restrained in spirit, her wood-block prints interested all who appreciate refinement of taste.

DRAWINGS BY CHARLES H. WOODBURY.—In March a small collection of original drawings by Mr. Charles H. Woodbury was shown in the east gallery. These showed a phase of the artist's graphic powers which was quite new to many persons. Hitherto usually known for his subtle interpretation of the moods of the sea, Mr. Woodbury has in these drawings given glimpses of the Panama Canal, of the Maine Coast and of New Hampshire mountains, and treated his subjects with full appreciation of pencil technique.

MARTIN BIRNBAUM LECTURE.—The second lecture of the series for the year was held on the evening of January 23rd. The title of the lecture of the evening was "The Modern Artist's Point of View." The speaker, Mr. Martin Birnbaum, is well-known as a critic of unusual ability, and his treatment of the subject was greatly appreciated. In discussing the many influences which have been and are still brought to bear upon the contemporary artist, Mr. Birnbaum chose a standard of reason and good taste, welcoming in modern tendencies motives which led to largeness of vision, and pointing out inherent weaknesses. Much has been written or said in praise or condemnation of the modern spirit in art, but few of these discussions have the clearness and appeal to a common-sense judgment

which characterized Mr. Birnbaum's lecture. The informal discussion by Mr. Birnbaum regarding Léon Bakst and his work, which was held in the special exhibition galleries after the more formal lecture, proved of very great interest.

EXHIBITION OF SMALL BRONZES.—

The art of making small bronzes, which met with so much favor in the Renaissance, has in recent years been revived with great success, especially in America. This has been made possible largely through a higher standard of art for the home, and a greater appreciation of the intimate character of small bronzes. American artists have discovered that an infinite variety of subjects may be found at home, and as a result their art has decided individuality. This is very characteristic of the exhibition of small bronzes by American sculptors which were seen in the galleries in March. Of these, fifty-six were exhibited through the courtesy of the American Federation of Arts. In this group were shown representative work of such well-known sculptors as Herbert Adams, Chester Beach, Carl Bitter, Victor D. Brenner, Mrs. Gail S. Corbett, Miss Abastenia St. L. Eberle, Harriet Frishmuth, D. C. French, Miss Hyatt, Mr. and Mrs. H. A. MacNeill, Attilio Piccirilli, Edward Y. Quinn, Janet Scudder, Amory Simons, Bessie Potter Vonnoh and Adolph A. Weinman. In addition there was shown the "Indian and Deer" by Paulanship, lent by Mrs. Jesse H. Metcalf, two bronzes by E. F. Sanford and Eli Harvey, lent by Miss Ellen D. Sharpe, and "Pegasus" by E. F. Sanford, which has recently been given to the Museum by Miss Sharpe.

A feature of the exhibition was the group of bronzes by Mr. Albert H. Atkins and Mrs. Louisa Allen-Hobbs. Mr. Atkins is in charge of the department of sculpture in the School of Design, while Mrs. Hobbs received her training in that department. The work of both was very distinctive, and an interesting addition to the notable group on view.

EXHIBITION OF JAPANESE INRO.—

Among the applied arts of Japan, the manufacture of lacquered objects for common use has received constant attention. Of these the *inro* deserves especial study. This was used for a medicine or seal-box, and was a necessary feature of the man's dress. Its limited surface and form challenged the skill of the artists, and as a result, the decoration is of the highest order.

Through the courtesy of Yamanaka & Co. of Boston, there has been shown in the museum galleries a comprehensive collection of fifty specimens, carefully selected to illustrate the various treatments of the surface. Since the introduction of artistic *inro* by Matahei in the seventeenth century, the artists have constantly worked for new effects. The *inro* in the Yamanaka loan show the great variety of *makiyé* or gold lacquer, the use of mother-of-pearl inlay, the refinement of design and ornament which characterizes the work of the Japanese, and the carved *netsuke* or buttons of ivory, wood or lacquer, from which they were hung. The artistic merit of both *inro* and *netsuke* illustrates the emphasis on craftsmanship of the highest order which has been demanded by the Japanese people. In this respect we have much to learn from the Orient.

THE NEW BUILDINGS.—

The larger School of Design, both in equipment and influence, which has been the dream of its friends for years, becomes more tangible every day as progress is made on the new buildings for the textile department and for the central heating plant. With the excavations completed and the foundations in process of development, the building will doubtless be ready for occupancy at the beginning of the new school year. Great as this step may be in increasing the opportunities which the School may offer, the institution still has in mind the vision of other buildings for future expansion, and a new museum to house its large and valuable collection in the most approved manner.

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HOURS OF OPENING.—The galleries
are open to the public on every day of the
year, with the exception of Thanksgiving
Day, Christmas Day, and the Fourth of
July. From July 1st to September 15th
the hours are from 1 to 5 P. M. on week
days and from 2 to 5 P. M. Sundays; from
September 15th to July 1st the hours are
from 10 A. M. to 5 P. M. week days and
from 2 to 5 P. M. Sundays. The Pendle-

ton Collection is open from 2 to 5 P. M.
daily.

Twenty-five cents admission to the
museum is charged on Mondays, Wednes-
days and Fridays and the museum is free
on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and
Sundays.

Free transferable tickets admitting four
persons on pay-days are sent to all mem-
bers of the corporation. Art students
and artists, on application to the authori-
ties, may obtain free tickets of admission
for pay-day. Teachers with pupils of
both public and private schools will be
admitted without payment upon applica-
tion.

PHOTOGRAPHS ON SALE.

Photographic copies of many of the ob-
jects belonging to the museum, including
photographs of the Pendleton Collection
of furniture, are on sale at the entrance to
the museum.

PUBLICATIONS.

Four quarterly bulletins are issued and
are sent free of charge to the members,
and, on written request, to alumni of the
institution.

The year-book of the school containing
detailed information regarding its many
activities, and presenting conditions of ad-
mission and a list of the courses given in
its several departments, will be forwarded
free of charge to prospective students and
others who are interested in the institu-
tion and its work.

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LIBRARY.

The Library contains 2,595 volumes,
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1,126 postcards. During the months of
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